



# California Medical Association

*Physicians dedicated to the health of Californians*

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November 16, 2009

## **To the California Congressional Delegation:**

The CMA urges you to Vote YES on HR 3961, the Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act of 2009 which will be up for a floor vote this week. We are joining with **California AARP** to ask you to support the Medicare program and protect access to doctors for California seniors. Please see the attached joint CMA-AARP Press Release issued today.

Medicare is the dominant force in our nation's health care system, impacting both public programs and the private marketplace. Therefore, it is crucial that Congress address the fundamental problems in the Medicare program as part of health care reform. CMA urges you to vote to repeal the current flawed Medicare SGR payment formula to protect California patients' ability to find a doctor.

HR 3961 would repeal the current Medicare SGR formula and its nearly 40% in future payment cuts. If Congress does not act soon, physicians will be cut by 21% in two months. HR 3961 is essential to keeping doctors in the Medicare and TRICARE programs so California's seniors, military families and the disabled can get the care they need. In 2005, the cost to eliminate the SGR was \$48 billion. Today, it is \$200+ billion. Every California representative agrees it needs to be fixed. But the longer Congress procrastinates, the higher the price tag for California taxpayers and the harder it will become to find doctors. Please vote to eliminate the current SGR and help establish a more reasonable, stable system going forward.

In California, we have an aging physician workforce (48% of physicians are over age 50). There has been an exodus of physicians from the state because of the difficult practice environment, and we are experiencing increasing difficulty attracting new or young physicians to California. We are facing severe physician shortages, particularly in primary care where we have one of the lowest physician-patient ratios in the country. Without the enactment of long-term sustainable reforms, patients will have a harder time finding doctors. Several years ago, a CMA survey showed that more than 60% of physicians said they would be forced to stop taking new Medicare patients if a 5% Medicare cut occurred. Today physicians are facing 20%+ cuts which simply won't allow doctors to keep their doors open.

Please support this important legislation which saves taxpayers in the long term and protects seniors' ability to keep their doctor.

Sincerely,

J. Brennan Cassidy, MD  
President